



Evaluating the Impact of Clean Indoor Air Laws

Public Health Problem

Secondhand smoke exposure poses serious health risks to nonsmokers. Recent studies suggest that even short-term exposures, such as those experienced by patrons in restaurants or bars that allow smoking, may increase the risk of a heart attack. Studies have found that restaurant and bar workers are less likely than other workers to be protected by smoke-free workplace policies and more likely to be exposed to high levels of secondhand smoke on the job. The Surgeon General has concluded that smoke-free policies are the most effective method for reducing secondhand smoke exposure. A Healthy People 2010 objective calls for the adoption of state clean indoor laws in workplaces and public places.

Taking Action

In 2003, both the state and the city of New York implemented comprehensive clean indoor air laws, making most enclosed workplaces and public places, including restaurants and bars, smoke free. Both the state and the city have conducted thorough, systematic evaluations of the impact of these laws.

The evaluations found that both the state and city laws are highly popular; that most restaurants, bars, and other workplaces are complying with their provisions; that air quality in hospitality venues has improved substantially since the laws took effect; and that worker secondhand smoke exposure has fallen sharply. The findings regarding improved air quality and reduced secondhand smoke exposure would be expected to translate into reduced rates of health conditions associated with this exposure. New York City has reported a sharp reduction in adult smoking prevalence since its law took effect, although other factors, including an increase in the cigarette excise tax, a media/public education campaign, and cessation initiatives, likely also contributed to this outcome. Finally, the evaluations have found that the laws have not harmed restaurant and bar business, as measured by business tax receipts, employment, and the number of liquor licenses issued. A recent study in MMWR reported that the level of particulate matter fell sharply in a number of hospitality venues in western New York after the state law was implemented.

Implications and Impact

The findings of these evaluations add to the evidence that smoke-free policies in workplaces and public places protect nonsmoking employees and patrons from the health risks posed by secondhand smoke without causing a decline in restaurant and bar business. CDC provided technical assistance to the New York state program as it planned its evaluation and worked with the program to disseminate its evaluation methods and findings. The extensive range of approaches being used to assess the impact of these laws provides a menu for other states and communities.

Contact Information

New York State Department of Health
Room 710 Corning Tower, Albany, NY 12237
Web site: www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/smoking/main.htm
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/exemplary>